

Annual Awards Ceremony

Address by Mr. Richard Helms

Director of Central Intelligence

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I don't know that 24 years has any deep significance and I would prefer to spend the time today not so much looking ahead but discussing briefly some of our current problems and challenges. On our 25th anniversary next year we can indulge in all kinds of self-congratulations about our having stayed the course for 25 years. I think those of us who have a chance for the 25-year certificate may identify with the reaction the little French boy got when he came in from school one day having just started to study the French Revolution. He ran up to his aged grandfather who was rocking in the chair by the fire, and said: "Grandpapa, I've been studying the French Revolution today and Mama tells me that you were in the French Revolution. What did you do, Grandpapa?" The old man rocked back and forth for a few minutes and finally he said: "My son, I survived!" I think those who have 20-year certificates and are looking forward to 25-year certificates next year must look at it in about that perspective.

I recently made a trip to the Middle East. I guess you all knew that since the papers seemed to discover that I was at least in Israel. I mention this not because I want to get back into the points that I made in the State of the Agency message some weeks ago, but simply to say that twenty years does make a lot of difference in the way we do things and more importantly in our ability to accomplish our objectives. I was very much taken on this trip with how experienced our associates have become, how quietly and skillfully they do things, how little fuss and feathers seems to go along with them and yet they have the right connections. They have a great ability to organize in addition to doing their clandestine work. I came back with the sensation that not only have we come of age, something we've said to ourselves on various occasions before, but that in this process there's been a honing and refining that is very pleasant to see. I think that any of you who would have the possibility of making a trip like this, not only to the Middle East, it could be to Europe, or Africa, or Asia, or Latin America, would see that we're doing our job these days in a quiet and effective way. This is what we were all hoping we'd some day be able to do 24 years ago and I like the feeling that we're there and that we are able to accomplish these things.

The other day a man from Newsweek was talking to me about an article which I understand they're going to produce one of these days about the intelligence community and he asked me a question which, as I recall it, was put rather this way: There are a lot of people who say that the CIA is no longer the dashing, dramatic, gung-ho outfit it once was, that it has become rather grey and that it's become rather humdrum and that there's been a tendency for people to become rather

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bureaucratic and so forth. How would you comment on that? And I said: Well, all human beings are permitted their own particular style. Back in the days of the fifties when Mr. Dulles was Director of the Agency he had his own particular style of doing things and we had some associates in those days who had their style of doing things. But I would not equate flamboyance with effectiveness or drama with objective results. I think we'd be better advised, I said to this man, to view what the Agency does today in terms of how well it does it, and how effectively it does it, and I think we can get a lot more work done by being possibly a little grey, possibly in the shadows, not constantly in the spotlight, and that this is the way I would prefer to see it. I would prefer to see us get more expert and less flamboyant. I would prefer to see us achieve our objectives with less fuss and feathers and noise and all the rest of it. In the end I mentioned that we could hardly stand another Bay of Pigs, and that this kind of large-scale activity was something that I thought we could do without, and this is indeed the way I feel. I am not looking for swashbucklers these days. I'm not looking for that dramatic fellow who is going to have us in the paper every other day. I am looking for the kind of human being we have who gets on with his job and gets on with it quietly.

I certainly haven't enjoyed seeing our activities in Laos exposed in the press to the extent they have been in recent weeks, but this was inevitable. Most of us who have lived through these years attempting to fight this war by proxy, if you like, have recognized that one day it was going to spill over if it went on long enough, and it certainly has gone on long enough. I don't think that we need to be deeply upset over these developments. You know and I know because the experience of the Agency has taught us this, that any activity which goes on for an extended period of time is bound to be uncovered and publicized in the end in a democratic society, so let's face it. If we want to prevent that, the thing to do is to knock it off at a time and place of our own choosing. But since this is not the case with respect to activities in Laos, we simply have to, as the Texans say, hunker down and accept the publicity and still try to get on with the job within the limits that are presented to us.

Now this is not to say that the Pentagon Papers and various other exposures of that kind are anything that I think should be condoned. In a disciplined society that kind of thing should not happen, but we don't have a disciplined society in the United States these days. One does not have to be a devotee of B. F. Skinner to recognize that total freedom and the right of the individual to do

anything he pleases is not inherent in any democratic process. I find offensive the idea that one person has a higher set of values than another in our society or that he's closer to the good Lord than some of the rest of us and therefore can show us the way. I would not like to see this idea picked up by any individuals who work with us in the Agency. We've done everything we know to set up mechanisms whereby anybody who has got anything on his mind can talk to some senior person. My door is certainly open. I'm glad to sit down and do this if somebody has trials and tribulations. Taking the trials and tribulations to the newspapers, to the Congress, or to places of this kind, where they are inevitably going to become public, is not the way to do business. And we haven't done it that way.

This is only a preamble on my part to saying that I want to thank each and every one of you for the reserve and discipline and good behaviour that has characterized the Agency for 10 these many years. I've a very warm feeling about this and I can only express my appreciation. I know it takes discipline particularly when one is being sorely tried by beliefs and convictions which possibly go against some of the things that are happening in our society. I regard it as evidence of individual maturity and individual good sense when one is able to handle these things in the context of one's own mind, or at least with the help of associates, friends, and if necessary, supervisors. I am mindful of what an extraordinarily good record the Agency has had with respect to leaks and complaints and all the rest of it. I do thank you for it. But I suppose that's pointless because what am I thanking you for? I'm thanking you for being good and patriotic citizens but this is in no sense a demeaning remark that I make. I do appreciate it. This isn't only personally, but I appreciate it on behalf of everybody in the Agency. Our life could become unmanageable if our sense of self-reliance and self-dependence comes unstuck and this I would certainly not like to see.

As you all are aware, we're up against some problems in respect to the President's new economic policy. We have a wage freeze in effect in the Agency which means a promotion freeze, just the way everybody else in the Government has and industry as well. I don't know how long this freeze is going to hold. We'll have to be guided by the President's wishes in the matter. We also, in two different bites, have been asked to reduce our average grade and at the same time take a five percent personnel cut. These are all matters with which you are thoroughly familiar, I know that. We have not worked this out yet. We don't know what this exactly means to us. We're working hard on it now. We've got to have consultations with the Office of Management and Budget; we may have to ask for relief from

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some of this. I don't know exactly how it's going to work out, but I do want to assure you that we'll let you know as soon as we know. We're not hiding anything from you. There's no effort here to keep this in a dark hole and suddenly come up one day and visit something unpleasant on you. You know the facts. This is what we have been told to do. And now the question is how we work it out and how we're going to deal with it.

But in this general connection I would like to say to this audience that the country's economy is really not in the snappy shape that we've been led to think it was in the recent past. Since World War II the United States has had a remarkable degree of affluence. I suppose no country in the history of the world has ever had an economy booming along as the United States has had. But there is always a tendency when one booms along to have a headache later on, with governments as well as with humans, and the headache is here. I, on various occasions in the recent past, have mentioned to some of my contemporaries that anybody who remembers the depression will understand that America can get in a pretty tough economic jam and with no intention on the part of anyone to put it there. We have tended to forget all this. We've tended to think that there's nothing you can do to the American economy -- it just booms along -- that's all there is to it. You can turn the tap up a little bit, you can turn it down a little bit, but there is no problem. But the world is rather quietly changed. We're in a time now of a kind of fluidity that I don't think any of us has seen for a long time. This isn't only true in the economic and fiscal sphere and monetary sphere, but it is also true in the political and military sphere. The relationship of the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the United States, the advent of Japan on the scene with its enormous gross national product, the entrance of Britain into the Common Market which will undoubtedly take place in a short period of time, all of these things are making for change, and the kind of change is rather hard to predict. But we are in a state of fluidity. And these are rather subtle changes that are taking place. There are those who contend on the one hand that we have a really remarkable balance of power in the world at the moment and that therefore things are inevitably getting better. One may argue on the other side that we don't have any balance of power in the world these days at all. We have a state of considerable fluidity which can go one way or the other almost overnight and then we would have a very different world. I'm not trying to make predictions. I'm simply trying to say that as intelligence officers we're living in a particularly tricky time.

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But to come back to the economics of all this. I think the United States is probably going to have a sticky period, and I don't know how long it's going to last. But we mustn't think that we're in any sense exceptions, that somebody is going to give us a privileged position with bigger budgets than somebody else is going to get. We're going to have to take our share of the pain. I don't have any solace to offer. I simply state this as a fact. I don't think anybody who is doing his or her job well and imaginatively and so on has anything to worry about. For those who have become quietly timeservers and, you know, just waiting out this and waiting out the other thing, there may be some problems for them. I am not threatening anybody, I'm simply stating that if we have to cut down we are going to have to find some means of cutting down and I would hope that those who've done the best job would survive and those who do the least good job would not. After all, this is what life is all about.

To conclude, I want to go to a different subject and one which I talked briefly with some of the summer employees about. I have had all kinds of suggestions from various members in the Agency, from the MAG group, from my own associates, from anybody who cared to put forward ideas about how the Agency should conduct its public relations; how it should burnish its image; how it should do various things as it lives in 1971 and heads towards 1972. I've given all of these ideas a good deal of attention and have studied them and have accepted some and will undoubtedly at another time accept others. But in this connection I did want to suggest to those of you who are known publicly as Central Intelligence Agency employees that you can indeed help how other people feel about the Agency more than any single thing we can do. I would like to think that when an opportunity, when the Agency is under attack or being accused of some heinous crime, that you would speak up and defend it. I'm not asking for missionaries, I'm not asking you to go out into the highways and byways and try and sell the Agency to anybody. That is not my point. It simply is that in times past I have had the sensation that because one worked for the CIA one tended to want to be very secretive and not have very much to say about it, and to pretend that it didn't exist and so on. I see no point in that in the year 1971. I would like to suggest that you stand up for your side as you would stand up for your wife or your mother or your children or whatever the case might be.

I gave a talk to the American Society of Newspaper Editors last winter, as you know, and I did it for only one purpose. That was to try and put in the record a few of these denials that we've all wanted to see put in the public record for some time. And you can rely on

those denials. They're true, and you can use that as any text that you may need to demonstrate that we're not in the drug traffic, and that we're not trying to do espionage on American citizens in the United States, and we're not tapping telephone lines, and that we're not doing a lot of other things which we're accused of doing. One of the things that tends to perpetuate some of these silly ideas are jokes that are made about them, particularly about domestic espionage. Although the jokes have no basis in fact they nevertheless give us a name which we don't deserve. I don't say that that makes all that much difference, but it does make some difference, and this tends to spill over, so I would like to suggest that if you have it in your hearts to do so that you speak up when the occasion arises and try and set the facts straight. This is really the way to improve our standing and improve our image. We will try to find some other rather low key things to do. I think we may perhaps sort of make a few more appearances on college campuses in connection with seminars and things of this kind, but we'll work that out as we go along.

But I did want you to know that all of your ideas have been thoughtfully considered and that if they aren't accepted today, they may be accepted tomorrow.

This concludes our 24th anniversary ceremony. I'd like to extend congratulations to all of those who received certificates today. I like to see this large number of individuals who have been with us for ten years, fifteen years, twenty years, and perhaps next year, twenty-five years. And as we go along toward our 25th year, I wish you all kinds of good luck, good health, and best wishes.